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Engaging Audiences: Smartphone Use in Live Performance

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Engaging Audiences: Smartphone Use in Live Performance

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Abstract

Engaging Audiences: Smartphone Use in Live Performance

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Smartphones have become integral to modern society and culture. We use them daily for communication, research, and recreation. In live theatre, smartphones become disruptive when audience members interact with them rather than view the performance. Smartphones by themselves are not a distraction, but even without interaction they buzz, light up, and make noise. For these reasons, smartphones are also considered as a distraction from other forms of live entertainment, like movie theaters, concert venues, and museums.

I believe smartphones are a huge untapped resource to further connect the audience with live performance experiences. Smartphones have the capability to create a new level of engagement by giving audiences agency over how they want to participate within a theatrical experience. While there are already plays that integrate smartphones, this thesis investigates smartphones as a storytelling device. Specifically I will look at integrating smartphones in a live-performance narrative to enhance audience engagement. To do this, I will focus on three main questions: Can smartphones successfully be used to engage audiences by giving them agency over the narrative? What forms of smartphone communication allow audiences to easily interact with the narrative? Can audiences feel that the choices they make with their smartphone affect the arc of the narrative?

In order to determine how effective smartphone use in live theatre is, I will create an original play that purposefully interweaves audience engagement with smartphones

throughout the narrative. To gauge the success of this investigation I will gather data from the participants during and after the performance.

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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

Chapter 1: About Me

PUZZLES

I love puzzles. As a young child I enjoyed solving jigsaw puzzles, and feeling the rush of excitement when I got to stand back and see what I had achieved. As I grew older I discovered a variety of puzzle video games. They involved more complicated puzzles with in depth clue searching and note taking. After spending countless hours of solving riddles, I once again could revel in accomplishment. When I reached high school, and became involved with technical theatre, design seemed like a three-dimensional puzzle. Each production allowed me a new opportunity to create an experience the audience could visit from scratch. They presented me with new challenges to create a theatrical space where people suspend their disbelief, and craft cohesive rules in a refined space. Each challenge only spurred me to achieve a higher goal. All through my college career, design continued to feel like puzzles waiting to be solved. Live Theatre became a major passion of mine, discovering and solving collaborative puzzles. A performance becomes a puzzle for the audience. They never see the full picture until the end, allowing their imaginations to fill in the gaps through the performance. It was not until a few years after college that I discovered escape rooms, a physical puzzle designed to promote collaboration with strangers in close quarters with the sole goal to escape the room. My deep passion for puzzles lead me to Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin, where I faced my greatest puzzle yet: How to bring the same excitement of solving a puzzle to live performance. This question led me to explore how to engage audiences through their smartphones in live performance.

Chapter 2: Smartphones and Live Theatre

SMARTPHONES IN LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Smartphones have become more integrated in daily society, to the point that many forms of live entertainment have begun to incorporate them into their productions. While many non-traditional forms of live entertainment are already using smartphones to drive the narrative, Meow Wolf's *House of Eternal Return* and some dinner-theatre shows, not many traditional theatre productions have not yet been able to use smartphones to successfully drive the narrative into an engaging performance.

In most traditional forms of live theater productions, Smartphones have the reputation of being disruptive by distracting the audience and removing them from the narrative of the performance. They are also considered a distraction in other forms of live entertainment such as movies, concerts, and museums. Even in day to day conversation if someone looks at their phone, they are momentarily removed from the conversation and breaks the flow of information.

On the other hand, I believe smartphones are a huge untapped resource to further connect the audience with live performance. Smartphones have become integral to modern society and culture. We use them daily for communication, research, and recreation.

In traditional theatre productions, smartphones can bring the production closer to the audience from the comfort of their seat. Smartphones have the capability to create a new level of engagement by giving audiences agency over how they want to participate within a theatrical setting.

LIVE THEATRE

Historically, theatre is a reflection of the values of society and the technology that surrounds us. In modern society, smartphones have become an essential element of most people's daily routines. We have them integrated into our day to day lives for communication, transportation, and recreation. Smartphones keep us constantly connected with Facebook and email, while simultaneously satisfying our need for constant stimulation via YouTube and Twitter.

The idea of theatre comes from the Greek word meaning “a place for viewing”. This is represented as actors on stage performing for audiences seated in front of them with a clear separation between performer and audience. I consider this to be “traditional” theatre. The popular trends in contemporary theatre are immersive theatre and audience engagement with the aid of digital technology. Immersive theatre differs from traditional theatre by removing the stage and placing the audience within the action of the production, blurring the line between audience and set.

Audience participation is any time the audience is involved in some aspect in the production. By knowingly entering a participatory production, the audience enters into an unspoken contract with the actors by giving suggestions and interacting with the performers, beyond sitting and viewing. Audience participation differs from immersive theatre because audience engagement can happen in any form of theatre, be it street theatre or traditional theatre.

SECTION 2: RESEARCH METHODS

To deepen my understanding of different types of theatre that engage and immerse audiences, I spent a majority of the summer of 2018 visiting a variety of shows to compare low-profile intimate theater productions with more high-profile mainstream immersive theatre productions/ installations. My goal was to gain an understanding of what current theatre producers were doing in order to engage audiences and how they are building immersive environments. The questions I considered were: How does the performance create audience engagement? Does engaging the audience have a cohesive link to the narrative? Which techniques were successful in engaging audiences?

Chapter 3: Current Performances/Installations

MISS BEHAVE GAME SHOW

The first stop on my journey was Las Vegas, Nevada, where a friend of mine recommended that I see the *Miss Behave Gameshow*. This show could be characterized less as a performance and more as a random trivia/trick question experience. It took place in a small back room of a casino, with an audience of about 50 people. There was a small stage with cardboard pieces plastered on the back wall, and each piece had a seemingly meaningless word or phrase written on it. Miss Behave, a drag queen, entered to much fanfare and separated the audience into Android users and Apple users. Throughout the show, we were asked to send texts of funny words and selfies to a phone number, yell out answers, and perform physical gestures and acts. Points were given and taken on an indiscriminate basis (you could ask for a point, or demand the other team lose points), and by the end the whole show had devolved into a lewd shouting match between the two teams and Miss Behave. After the show I had a chance to speak with Miss Behave briefly. I asked her about the limited cellphone use and she said that if the audience tends to be quiet and reserved, the performers fall back on smartphones and texting to keep the audience involved if they are not interested in getting up and being active. However, our audience that evening was quick to catch on and became very participatory, so Miss Behave did not feel the need to keep pressing the use of phones for the performance. Overall, I found the experience exciting and different from what a “traditional” theatre experience is, however, it did not have an emotional impact on me or the story. It can be compared to *Family Feud*

or *Jeopardy*, but in the style of a college party drinking game (without all the shots): Engaging and fun, but not much substance to talk about afterward.

MARRIAGE CAN BE MURDER

My next investigation took me to another small-venue show in Las Vegas, which had an audience of roughly fifty people: *Marriage can be Murder*. This was advertised as a murder-mystery dinner show. Each person was greeted by the maître d'hôtel before entering, and further welcomed by his female assistant (Unfortunately, I do not remember the character names). Let's call the Maître D, Dennis, and his assistant Anne.. Once we were seated at our tables, we gave our food orders. Then, the show began. Dennis went around the room, asking people why they had come out that night, among other silly questions. Anne then began interacting with the guests, establishing her ditzzy character. This went on for a few minutes until Dennis pulled out a gun and held people hostage, revealing himself to be a hitman. A cop, let's call him Carl, entered and killed Dennis. However, it was revealed that the person who hired Dennis was still in the room. Here, the investigation asked the audience members to find the killer and look for clues. A business card was found, along with other props. The audience was given ten minutes to look around the room and talk with other patrons to gather as much information as possible. I went to the bar thinking the bartender was "in on it" (he wasn't). When we are all seated again, a woman stood up, screamed, ran out of the room, and died. When it was revealed that her hand sanitizer had been poisoned, her husband was interviewed to determine why she would have been a target. He was listed as suspect number one, while the audience searched for more clues.

This changed when he was mysteriously killed, leaving the audience with no suspects. Suddenly the show started coming to a close. As Carl closed the show, the man sitting next to me stood up and claimed he was the one who hired the hitman. He was shot by the cop, and the show ended.

When we sat down, we were all given cards to take notes on. There were 4 “sections” on the card. Each section gave you space to fill in a blank for “Victim”, “Killer,” and “Motive,” as well as other space to write personal notes. Before the show ended, only 3 people were killed, and then they collected the cards. Then they killed off the final hitman, who was victim #4.

At the beginning of the performance, the audience was made aware of a Facebook page for the event, which we were encouraged to look at and gather information from. Here they posted pictures from the show, asked audiences to send pictures of suspicious people, and take selfies with actors. I was very active and eventually won an award for “most participatory on Facebook”. While it was interesting to use Facebook as a medium of engagement, it did not feel necessary to the show. It successfully engaged me before the show, but it failed to connect me to the narrative.

SUMMARY OF MISS BEHAVE AND MARRIAGE CAN BE MURDER

For both *Miss Behave* and *Marriage can be Murder*, I learned that drunk audience members present a difficult problem for interactive theatre. On the one hand, they are highly participatory, which fulfills the goal of engaging the audience. On the other hand, their lack of inhibition can eventually break the immersion for other audience members. If they are too inebriated to engage with

the fictional world of the play, they are likely to break that world for other audience members.

In the end, I felt very confused and frustrated by the performance as a whole. The clues and dialogue seemed to go nowhere, as most of it was making audience members do foolish things. The “pool of suspects” felt too large to successfully choose who the killer was in a room of fifty people, when only given ten minutes to talk with anyone before the second person was killed. I was surprised that I had been sitting next to the killer the whole time, and even had a conversation with him. He gave a valid reason for being at the party and was mostly quiet during the rest of the show. Now that I look back at the performance, I realize that he was in many of the pictures taken during the performance, usually stalking in the background. He was also “interviewed” by Dennis near the beginning. Though the show was entertaining, its mystery proved too difficult to navigate. The clues, interviews and story did not point to any particular suspect, much less a group of them. Therefore, it did not present a mystery that could be solved. I discovered that there was a fine line between subtle clues and a lack of narrative direction.

SLEEP NO MORE

After Las Vegas, my travels took me to New York City, where I saw *Sleep No More*. This was the most unique style of immersive theatre I have experienced. Summarizing the experience would be like describing a fever dream, so I will try to keep it brief. You enter into a dark hallway “maze” and find your way to a dimly lit 1920s style bar with a live band with red curtains all around. This

reminded me of the Overlook Hotel from the movie *The Shining*: the foggy room filled with music from decades ago. *Sleep No More's* mood immediately felt ghostly and hypnotic, ready to carry you away into the depths of what waits beyond. In the bar room, audience members were called to a corner of the room based on a playing card that they were given earlier. We were shuffled into a small room and given a brief introduction about the “McKittrick Hotel”, and its guests. We were told not to talk, never to remove our masks, and that we were free to wander the hotel anywhere. We were then moved into an elevator, and audience members were let out on random floors.

From here, we could follow actors, or simply stay in one place, but everything was built very convincingly. There was a hotel lobby, a graveyard, a hospital wing, bathing rooms, a grand banquet (important later), and several dozen other rooms. Everything was real, and everything was dynamic. I wandered into a post office and read letters to various hotel guests, I found a candy shop and enjoyed a few sweets, I explored a nurse's office and found dozens of medical records, all existing in the world of the McKittrick Hotel. The amount of detail built into this multi-storytelling experience truly made it an incredible immersive experience. Eventually, I forgot I was witnessing a performance.

Actors would come in rooms, perform a scene silently, and continue with action elsewhere. Multiple times I would have to sprint after actors to see where they would go next, and several times I would change which actor I chose to follow. The constant sound of 1920's jazz and swing music playing softly in the background, which added an eerie element to the production. I watched an assault/attempted rape, a cheating wife steal from her lover/husband, a card game

that ends in violence, and the hanging of Macbeth (or the character I thought was Macbeth).

No words were ever spoken, and only the “hotel guests” did not wear masks. As an audience member, I felt like a voyeuristic spectator. I watched bizarre scenes unfold, but could not bring myself to step in or say something. I felt like a ghost. Hotel Guest paths crossed multiple times, and at some point the performance repeated (supposedly 3 times), as I remember seeing a scene unfold as it had previously.

A phrase that my brother and I used was “being pulled.” This literally meant that one of the guests would grab you by the hand, and carefully pull you into a private, locked room. I was pulled twice. The first time I was pulled by a nurse who removed my mask almost ritualistically, laid me on a bed and tucked me in, and seemed to treat me with medicines. She coughed up a nail, and told me not to tell anyone. She then put my mask back on, and led me out the door, where I was left alone, silently. It was a very emotional moment, as that was the only time my mask was ever taken off the entire experience.

SUMMARY OF SLEEP NO MORE

The most exciting thing about this experience is that I never knew what was going to happen next. It felt like witnessing real life without consequences. Watching others go through actions without words while still creating tension and plot was like a new way of “people watching.” Also, the level of full immersion is something that I have never experienced, and when everything was over, and we left the building, daylight hit us really hard. Walking onto the noisy, bright streets

of NYC was almost like a culture shock after 3-4 hours of wandering dark, mysterious pathways and in a state of wild, varying emotions.

The worst part of this experience was all the other audience members. I would try to keep up with hotel guests, and the large crowds of people would not get out of the way, especially if the hotel guest was running.

While this show did not involve any modern digital technology, it succeeded in creating an immersive environment loosely based off of the Macbeth story. However, if you went looking for a specific story or narrative, you would be greatly disappointed as you would be looking for something that might not even be there to begin with.

MEOW WOLF: HOUSE OF ETERNAL RETURN

The last stop on my research tour took me to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I immersed myself in the weird world of *Meow Wolf's House of Eternal Return*. This can best be categorized as immersive, artistic “eye candy.” Upon entering, you are shown the façade of a New-England style house and told to check the mailbox to start. There were letters to family members, and one from the show’s version of the FBI, which investigates weird inter-dimensional happenings. There was also a link to a website. The website looked very high tech, but was confusing to navigate, and it did not feel necessary to the story. After multiple attempts, I gave up and I did not end up using it again. Inside the house, guests were encouraged to look around and explore. I managed to find code words and phrases, and learn a bit more about the world of the house, and what its inhabitants were doing. After an hour of reading notes, journals, and trying different codes on

safes found around the house, I had determined that it was a lost cause, as I was going nowhere with my findings. In brief, the uncle of the house developed magic portals for inter-dimensional travel, and was operating a TripAdvisor style business, but to vacations in inter-dimensional lands. One of his nieces became sick because of his magic, and the family pet had died from a similar disease. I lost interest in the story from there, so I decided to simply explore the space. There was a “portal” in the kitchen, living room, and laundry room, where guests would have to crouch, climb, or walk through them to other dimensions. These other worlds stood in great contrast to the house, with vibrant colors, strange shapes, and unusual uses of the house’s framework. The majority of the experience felt like glorified jungle gyms (mostly because of young children running around), but the artistic spectacle and detail felt never-ending. One room was like a cartoon kitchen, with hard black outlines on all silverware and cabinets (think *Cuphead*¹). Another room was an alien landscape mixed with Beetlejuice-style architecture. Each room was different than the last. I explored for 4 hours total, and was still finding new rooms until the last half hour, when I finally began to repeat rooms. I could not find a story truly connecting these rooms except for the loose premise that these were inter-dimensional vacation spots. However, had I not spent some time actively searching for the underlying narrative, I would have even less

1 Cuphead is a classic run and gun action game heavily focused on boss battles. Inspired by cartoons of the 1930s, the visuals and audio are painstakingly created with the same techniques of the era: traditional hand drawn cel animation, watercolor backgrounds, and original jazz recordings.

understanding about why everything looked so strange. Every so often, characters from the world would appear and interact with guests. I had a conversation with the janitor, who spoke about his home planet and his strange hobbies. I also later spoke with an “alien” who praised the Uncle and his work, almost like a cult following. While it added another level of realism to the world, the story felt weak.

Guests were allowed to interact with all objects in each room: buttons, architecture, doors, props. However, the design of each room felt disjointed from the previous room’s aesthetic. A half-destroyed school bus turned into a fighter jet with buttons for liftoff and firing missiles, next to a room filled with different glowing eyes. There was a band playing in one of the rooms, which was loud and took me out of the immersiveness of the built environment. It distracted me from understanding what each individual part was, when nothing else in the environment was quite like the bands aesthetic.

The environment of the exhibit was astounding, but the narrative that linked each room together felt weak and secretive. It tried to tie everything together by writing notes based on clues hidden around the main house, but without a fuller explanation of the narrative, it lacked purpose. The story had a loose premise about portals leading to fantastical other worldly locations. While this allowed for endless creativity within each room, I could have entirely bypassed spending an hour reading notes and trying to find clues. Instead of most theatrical productions, which give the audience the framework for a narrative, *House of Eternal Return* made it the responsibility of the audience to learn the story themselves. This means that not everyone seeing the installation will discover the meaning of why things are designed the way they are, and could consider it to be a bizarre art

exhibit rather than a narrative brought to life. I felt it was a fun challenge to explore the house and learn the story for ourselves, but after an hour and a half of searching with little reward, I was frustrated and gave up. While this may be the intent of the design, it was something for me to consider when designing an engaging audience experience myself.

TWEET SEATS AND FERRY PLAY

Two other types of productions I researched into, but was unable to experience firsthand were Tweet Seats and *Ferry Play*. I read articles on how each of these utilized smartphones during live performances in different ways. Tweet Seats was a concept used by theatres to bring in young audiences with the premise of being able to be on your phone during the performance. Tweeters were seated in the back of the audience and asked questions throughout the performance on what they liked or did not like about the show. This, however, backfired because the tweeters could not actively pay attention to the performance while simultaneously tweeting about the show and enjoy it. Audiences would rather see the show than have to create instantaneous reviews from their seats during the show.

The other performance I researched was Not A Theatre Company's *Ferry Play*. This production takes place on the Staten Island ferry. This "podplay" is like an audio book the audience listens to that makes the audience more aware of the environment around them. This play is less focused on the technology aspect, and more on making audiences more aware of their surroundings. In the article, I read about two notable problems with Ferry Play. The timing of the audio did not

always match the pacing of the ferry, and people were waiting for some kind of a performance or action to happen, instead of experiencing the performance by being aware of their surroundings (“Staging a Play, on a Smartphone, on the Staten Island Ferry.”).

While these two other theatre forms utilize smartphones during a performance, they are more experimental and either do not drive the narrative forward, or actively engage their audience with the performance.

Chapter 4: Puzzles and Videogames

After my research trip, I felt that I had experienced a range of productions that incorporated different levels of immersion, technology, and performance, with varying degrees of success. I do acknowledge that this is a small sampling of productions, but I felt that some of the productions did not supply enough reason for me to continue searching for the narrative and find a resolve. I considered other forms of entertainment that create a self-driven motivation to seek the end of what was initially presented to a participant. One such medium that excels in self-driven progress are puzzles.

Puzzles bring out a personally driven motivation to solve them, and the gratification of finishing puzzles is very fulfilling. Take a jigsaw puzzle for instance: You start a puzzle with a single piece, not knowing what lies ahead, but as you progress, you see more and more of the “big picture,” until you think you can predict what the end will look like. When the last piece is placed, the satisfaction of seeing what you have put together by hand builds a confidence to try again, maybe even with a harder challenge. The modern, digital version of a jigsaw puzzle can be seen in video games. Videogames immerse the player in a digital world puzzle where the goal is to reach the end.

Puzzle video games have been tailored to individual players' need for exploration in an unknown world, as well as a drive to solve environmental puzzles. Two popular kinds of puzzle games are virtual escape rooms, and choose your own adventures.

In one such popular escape room videogame, *The Crimson Room*, a player is presented with an unfamiliar situation, and they need to solve the puzzle to

reach the end of the game in order to beat it. This game is a point-and-click style game where a character wakes up with amnesia and has to escape this mysterious room with seemingly no way out. As the player clicks around, they learn about their environment, and discover hidden clues for various props spread throughout the game. For instance, if the player clicks a desk drawer, they might find a torn piece of paper with a code on it, and a prompt of, “I wonder what this could be used for” appears on the screen. This gives the player a hint that this might be useful later, even if it is seemingly useless at the time. This need to reach some kind of end goal drives a player forward into the story of the game, and once the end is reached the player feels a sense of accomplishment after spending so much time trying to solve the game.

A newer style of video game, known as a Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) has been popular for several years, and recently came back into the limelight with a desktop game called *Undertale*. This game changes how the player interacts with other Non-Playable Characters (NPCs) and how the game ends. If the player were to kill all the monsters, the ending would be grimmer, whereas if the player were kind to everyone, the ending would be more wholesome. This not only allows for a more personalized experience within the game, but also builds in the ability to play the game multiple times without experiencing the same game-play each time. The player gets to experience a new form of the game by making different choices from the previous time they played the game.

Chapter 5: Basis of my Thesis

After I gathered as much information about current engaging live performance formats as I could find, and combined that with my knowledge of how videogames create action-driven narrative, I knew I wanted to create a performance that allowed the audience to shape the narrative. This in turn allowed me to study the success of my efforts. The basis of my study would focus on technology in a traditional theatre setting, notably a proscenium stage. I chose this staging configuration specifically because it is the most common theatre setting (“Theatre Terms.”), and I did not want to include variables like site-specific location to determine a successful performance. After researching into different ways theatre productions attempted to engage audiences, I did not feel that an immersive environment suited what I was after. An immersive environment naturally engages the audience with the production with physical movement through the space, where live theatre needs a narrative to achieve this. I decided that my main focus should be on the strength of the narrative, and how audiences could engage with it. The design process was based on maximizing audience engagement through the use of smartphones. To gauge the success of these decisions, I focused on three questions:

Can smartphones be successfully used to engage audiences by giving them agency over the narrative?

What forms of smartphone communication and interaction between performance and audience within a live performance are most successful?

Do audiences feel that their choices they make via smartphone affected the narrative?

To narrow down the scope of smartphone communication, I chose texting and polling as my mediums. These seemed the quickest and easiest way for audiences to engage without having to make accounts for external applications like Facebook or Twitter. I also considered surveying the audience before and after the performance to better understand how they experienced the show, if they felt smartphones aided or hindered the performance, and how they preferred to use their smartphone during the performance.

Taking all of these ideas into consideration, I settled on creating a live performance with a murder-mystery theme. This style of performance is generally known by most of the public, and tends to be very “hokey” and minimal in production value. This let the audience know that they would already make choices, and be part of a more imaginative performance that does not need to rely on large set pieces to complete a narrative. My goal was to have as few variables as possible within the setting to truly focus in on how smartphones are utilized in the performance. I wanted the audience to come in with an understanding that they were coming to see an optional participation production within a low-budget environment. If they came to the theatre with that understanding in mind, then their main focus becomes about the narrative and their personal level of engagement, rather than the lack of an extravagant set or glitches in the technology.

SECTION 3: PROCESS

Chapter 6: Forming A Narrative

Now that I have concluded what production format I wanted and what techniques to employ with regards to the use of smartphones, I can make a full plan on how to produce a choose-your-own-adventure performance. The things I took into consideration are: gathering a design team and cast, what kind of space should the performance be in, how to build a play with multiple flexible endings, scheduling, how the audience changes the narrative, and how to record all the data.

The underlying narrative is the most important part of the performance. Without it, none of the other technical or scenic elements have anything to back them up. I began to develop a widely complex narrative based around escape room concepts, complete with hidden doors and a lot of video game influence. However, this did not come to pass as it would have been impossible to complete with my limited time and resources. From there, I narrowed down my concept to function more as a prototype to test my assumptions about engaging smartphone use in the theater.

The theatre I chose was the Laboratory Theatre on the University of Texas at Austin campus. This theatre was small enough, about 100 seats, to allow for an intimate experience with audiences, but had a very defined barrier between audience and raised stage. Once this performance space was locked in, I was able to further implement designs based on the location.

I began in March 2018 by searching for a playwright, and met with Minghao Tu. He and I began talks about story building, and what the different beats are that the story needs to go through. I had trouble outlining these beats, and

eventually a friend of mine, Billy Peery, recommended I break each character's beats down into 8 steps: A character is in a zone of comfort, they want something, they enter into an unfamiliar situation, they adapt to it, they get what they wanted, they pay a heavy price for it, they return to their familiar situation, having changed. I used this 8-step outline to write character arcs for the 8 different characters, initially. My initial story was about God, who had invited the 7 deadly sins to his house for a party, and one of them kills God. However there was not enough substance behind each of the sins being invited by God for a party, and the idea was dropped. I felt that trying to create personality solely based on a singular sin would require too much exposition for an hour and a half performance. My second idea was based loosely off of the first. This idea was about an editor in chief of an online news organization who is hosting some kind of party and invites the audience as "esteemed guests." We are introduced to 7 different characters, each representing one of the sins. This idea had a wide range of characters including the Editor-In-Chief, his brother, his journalist, a political staffer, a celebrity, a rival Editor-In-Chief, and the company tech support. However once we started writing and pulling together the story arc with the multiple potential endings, we quickly discovered that this would be a huge undertaking with 6 potential endings and multiple moments of narrative change. Minghao and I decided to slim down the character selection to the editor in chief, his brother, his assistant, a politician, and a rival Editor-In-Chief.

Unfortunately, Minghao left the project, and I brought on my peer consultant Billy Peery, as the new playwright. He had been in the background with knowledge of the performance, and was able to jump right into the role. While writing down the story and character arcs, Billy and I discovered that we needed to

simultaneously weave in clues to be found, as well as audience participation moments. Billy and I determined that each character needs a means, a motive, and an opportunity to kill, and this makes them the murderer. This turned out to be a greater challenge than anticipated, as we needed to consider multiple potential variables while still creating a cohesive narrative. After doing a bit of research on how to properly write a murder mystery, I learned that they are usually written backwards, starting with the big reveal, and breaking the clues down from there. However this method is normally used for novellas with a singular ending. We were writing a story with multiple endings, so we would need to repeat this for each potential ending. This took the longest amount of time, as each clue would need to be specifically tailored to that ending, but still fit within the arc of each character, and why that clue would be discovered and how it ties to the means, motive, and opportunity.

In late December we had a script written, with full story arcs, audience engagement moments, and 4 potential endings. Now I was able to further my focus on how to engage the audience with their smartphones. The different ways that the audience would engage with the performance through their smartphones were multiple choice polling, free responses, and receive directions provided by us.

Chapter 7: Engagement Design

Originally I had searched for an app developer to create a custom app to build an all-in-one program to keep everything streamlined, but this proved to be difficult with little money in the budget, and a personal lack of programming knowledge. I decided to scrap the custom app, and treat this as a proof of concept prototype performance. I had to investigate what would be an easy and intuitive way the audience could interact with the performance. I researched multiple kinds of existing programs that poll audiences and send SMS services, and quickly discovered that there was no “one size fits all” solution. Eventually I narrowed my choices down to two: Poll Everywhere, and Textedly. Poll Everywhere is a web-based audience polling subscription service that provides a wide variety of polling options and customizability that other polling programs could not. It was able to update all data in real time, and provided options to either text in answers, or use a web browser. Poll Everywhere fit 2 of my 3 criteria, multiple choice polling and free response, however it could not send messages back to audience members. That is where Textedly comes in. Textedly is a subscription-based SMS service that can import multiple subscribers at once, send individual or group messages, and create auto-reply messages when a keyword is sent in. i.e. Text “KEYWORD” to [phone number], and you receive a reply of “Thanks for subscribing, etc”.

Chapter 8: Design Team Challenges

Throughout the writing and technology-searching period, I was simultaneously gathering a design and acting team. My priorities for searching for a production team were director, scenic/props designer, media designer, sound designer, costume designer, actors. My director, Jake Brinks, was quick to find, as I had put out a general notice looking for collaborators and he was eager to join. While I continued to search for designers, he looked for actors, as our audition was not very fruitful. I found a scenic designer and prop master, Jennica Dombrowski and Anna Pickett, half way through the writing period, so there was enough for them to take and design with. The set and props were required to be mobile, as the theatre space we were in hosted classes in the day, and could not have any structures on the stage that would interfere with them. The set also had to have numerous hiding places for props, as well as duplicate items that would be used for different endings. For instance, one ending involved the office being totally clean, while another had the office trashed. Two different computer monitors were needed, one that looked normal, and another that we had beaten half to death and looked very broken.

My lighting and costume designers, Kendra Wiley and Stephanie Fisher, joined early on as well, but their designs were not as crucial ahead of time to the performance. The fluidity of the script's multiple endings did not affect any costume changes. Similarly the lighting cues could remain the same throughout the show, regardless of how the show ended night to night. The media designer was difficult to find, as they were needed to design, build, and program their own content. Initially I had also wanted them to design and build their own media

playback system, but I took it on as a shared responsibility to take some pressure off of the media designer. Not many students had the skill set or the schedule to work on my thesis, which became very frustrating, as several initially said yes, and then would cancel a few weeks after. Thankfully, Taylor Travis, was able to take on the role as Media Designer. Her input was very valuable to the design, and incorporated other designs such as sound, props, and scenic.

Throughout the process there were moments when my design team was incomplete. I would step in and create a very basic design of what I imagine that design element should look like based on where the production was at that time. For example, when a Media designer was not present for much of the scenic design, I designed a general layout for the TVs and a system built around it. That way when Taylor joined, she did not have to start fully from scratch, and only had to modify what was already in place. A similar process happened when Minghao had to leave my thesis, and I had to write a majority of the narrative myself to make sure the story and technology could continue to grow together, otherwise there would be no substance for the thesis to stand on.

Chapter 9: Implementation of Media and Set Design

The overall media design used six televisions throughout the theatre. Three televisions center stage side by side, two televisions separated downstage of the proscenium for the audience, and one television at the back of the house in front of the booth to prompt the actors. For clarity, I will refer to them as Stage TV, Audience TV, and Prompt TV. The Stage TVs were used for images and videos relating to the story. This included pictures of the body, office, and various clues that could be found. The Audience TVs were for audience engagement moments. We showed the poll questions and results, as well as free response answers on these TVs. This way the audience knew what content related to them, vs what was part of the performance. The Prompt TV was used to display keywords to the actors throughout the performance. These keywords would let the actors know which choices the audience made, and the actors would say the according line of the script that went with the audience's choice. This is the main way we were able to have a fluid script and change the show at a moments notice.

Chapter 10: First Encounter, First Engagement

The components that allowed the performance to engage audiences began with the design of the posters, all the way to five minutes before the performance began. My goal was to begin teaching the audience that smartphones were a vital tool to this performance, and that all communication and interaction with the performance could be done conveniently through their phone. They did not even need to visit a ticket booth. I wanted to create a new way for audiences to experience theatre, before and during the performance. I decided that if I am going to use smartphones as the main form of engagement with the performance, then I might as well begin that engagement as soon as an audience member shows interest in the performance.

Another question that I asked myself was how could I keep a record of how many audience members want to be engaged via smartphone through the performance, and how do I seamlessly start to build a language with the audience that smartphones are crucial to this performance without constantly asking for their information. I decided that the audiences would sign up for the show like they would for a subscription service. There would be no ticketing, but rather a sign up via text message mechanism. The poster had “Registration is required to attend” and “To Register, text FUNERAL to #####.” The poster did not have the performance location on it. This immediately forced audiences to begin using our system, and become familiar with it. Once they texted the number, they would receive an auto-reply listing different nights, and their associating keyword. i.e. For Saturday, reply NIGHT5. Once they texted the associated keyword (which was case sensitive, and became an issue later) they would receive another message

that contained a URL link to a Google form. They were prompted to fill out the form to finish registration. The Google form asked basic questions like name, email, and phone number. It also asked how engaged with the performance they wanted to be, ranging from “not at all,” “somewhat, but remain in my seat,” and “very engaged.” The three different categories would let me know statistically how many people wanted to participate, and also determine who would be able to participate fully. The people who marked “not at all” I assumed would not want to participate in the polling and free responses throughout the performance. The people who chose “somewhat, but remain in my seat” had the option to respond to polls throughout the performance, but were not required. The people who chose “very engaged” were also given the option to participate in polls, but they also received texts throughout the performance suggesting physical or vocal actions to do. This was something that had to be setup ahead of time, and could not be changed during the performance. The audience was also given the location of the theatre in the Google form. In hindsight, I should have put the location on the poster for people who make the last minute decision to show up. At the time I thought I would need more time to register “very engaged” people in the system, but I managed to find a faster way later in the process after posters were printed.

Once the audience members were registered, they simply had to show up. The audience was limited to ninety five people (due to theatre size), so should more than ninety five people attempt to sign up, the survey would close automatically and prompt them to choose a different night. Thankfully this was not an issue. However, there were people who signed up for the wrong night, or people who would reply with the keyword in lowercase, which the system would not recognize. I had to then manually go through the submissions and delete

them from the system and send them the correct text response. A majority of people generally thought the text system was easy to use, but a few struggled with it.

On the night of each performance, audience members would be asked if they were registered before entering the house, this way every person was accounted for. We did have some “no-shows,” but we knew that at least every person in the room was registered. Once seated, they were asked to go to a web browser and use the link displayed around the room to access a survey. This was the Poll Everywhere service, and while they did not know it yet, I would be able to activate and deactivate poll questions and they could visually see them appear on their devices. This comes in handy when I explain the Textedly system.

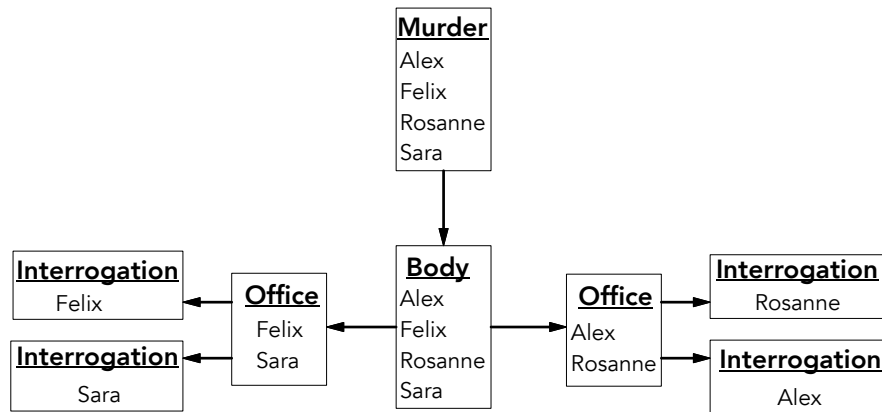
Chapter 11: Technology

Technology played an important role in the execution of the performance. I knew it would be a very involved technical element, but I was unsure of how to fully achieve it. With my background in lighting and projection design, I was able to clearly delegate those designs to other designers, but I took on the responsibility of integrating smartphones into the performance to further learn about its potential. What I did not expect was how intricate the system became, and how each element of design had to be balanced with smartphone integration. For more information on how I built the system that links the playback computers together with the smartphone polling software, refer to *Appendix A: Technology and System Design*.

Chapter 12: Clue Breakdown

From the very beginning of writing and constructing the script, I had made multiple charts and breakdowns trying to describe how the narrative would change based on the audience's choices. I had to clearly describe what questions the audience was asked, what those answers were, how they related to the characters, how they related to clues in the script, and where those clues were located. My first chart was to create an overall breakdown of how to narrow down the suspects to an individual person (see Illustration A). For a list of all character names and roles, please refer to *Appendix B: Character Names and Roles*. The murder of Leo is the initial point where the audience could begin narrowing down the suspects. Each suspect was given an equal reason of why they hated Leo and why they *might* have wanted him dead. From there, we moved into the body search. Here we found more clues on how Leo was killed, and maybe one or two “red herrings” of who the killer might be, such as two clues that point to different suspects. The next beat was the office search, where we narrowed down the suspects to two of the four by having one clue relate to two suspects. i.e. sneaker prints found on the carpet related to Alex and Felix, whereas dress shoe prints related to Sara and Roseanne. The final beat was during the interrogations where the audience could narrow it down to one true suspect.

Illustration A: Initial Character Clue Breakdown



In a later version of the clues breakdown, I dissected it further into body questions, office questions, interrogation questions, body search, and office search (see Illustration B). My plan was to further sort these into columns for how each answer relates to a character, and where the associating clue can be found. Then on each night, using a “whiteboard” system, we would circle the answers the audiences would reply, and determine what clues needed to be found, and who the killer was, based on two main questions: What their footwear was, and if the office was messy or clean. These two questions were the only questions that distinctly put the person in the office. The footwear was something that could always be seen from the audience, so it was almost a “hidden in plain sight” clue. The office condition took a bit more consideration of how well the suspect would have known the office. Alex and Sara are not part of the company, and would have had to mess up the office looking for clues. Felix and Sara are much closer to Leo, and would not have to dig around as hard to know where things were. After gathering feedback from the audience, I learned that they wanted to choose the killer at the

end, rather than have it be secretly predetermined. I explain this further in Chapter 16: Guiding Questions Answered.

Illustration B: Final Clue Breakdown

Questions, Clues and Choices Checklist	Alex	Felix	Sara	Roseanne	RESULT:
key:					
Question	audience answer	audience answer	audience answer	audience answer	
LOCATION OF CLUE	clue	clue	clue	clue	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt for actor	prompt for actor	prompt for actor	prompt for actor	prompt for actor	
BODY QUESTIONS					
Would you consider yourself messy or clean?	Messy Office	Clean Office	Messy Office	clean Office	
OFFICE CONDITION	Messy Office	Clean Office	Messy Office	Clean Office	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt	~	~	~	~	
Do you prefer Formal or Casual?	Mostly Formal	Very Formal	Very Casual	Mostly Casual	
POCKET	Cease and desist	desperate letter from felix	\$100 Bill w/ note	coffee note	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt	cease and desist	desperate letter	100	coffee note	
Preferred communication?	Call	talk	Email	Text	
PHONE	Harrasing Calls	phone number blocked	threatening email	texts of Leo asking for overtime	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt	CL	TLK	email	text	
Preferred footwear?	comfort	comfort	style	style	
FOOTPRINTS	Sneakers	Sneakers	dress shoe	dress shoe	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt	sneakers	sneakers	dress shoe	dress shoe	
MURDER WEAPON MARK					
Is the pen mightier than the sword?	Sword is mightiest	Sword is almost mighty	pen is almost mighty	pen is mightiest	
BODY MARKS	bruise line on neck	square bruises on face	small stab wounds	large stab wounds	
WEAPON	ethernet cable	keyboard	pen	knife	
TV prompt	cable	keyboard	pen	knife	
OFFICE QUESTIONS					
Would you rather aks for permission or ask for forgiveness?	forgiveness	Permission	forgiveness	permission	
FILING CABINETS	death threats	overdue bills	bribery documents	mistreat employees	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt	threat	overdue bills	bribe	mistreat	
Would you rather make a new friend or lose a toxic one	Lose toxic	Gain	Lose Toxic	Gain	
DESK ITEM	debunked conspiracy docs	broken picture of Leo and Felix	opposing campaign button	resignation letter	GRN BLU YLO RED
TV prompt	debunked	broken picture	campaign button	resign	
INTERROGATION					
[based on if previous clues were found]					
key:					
Where clue was found	what to talk about if found	what to talk about if found	what to talk about if found	what to talk about if found	
POCKET	cease and desist	desperate letter	100\$ Bill w/ note	coffee note	GRN BLU YLO RED
PHONE	harassing calls	blocked number	threatening email	overtime	GRN BLU YLO RED
FILING CABINETS	death threats	Money docs	bribery docs	mistreat	GRN BLU YLO RED
DESK ITEM	debunked conspiracy	Broken Picture	opposing campaign button	resignation letter	GRN BLU YLO RED

SECTION 4: PRODUCTION

Chapter 13: Rehearsals and Performances

The rehearsal and tech process involved a lot of on-your-feet learning, as well as some sharing of responsibilities to ensure the production continued moving forward. Due to schedule conflicts, I was unable to find a stage manager. This meant that between the director, the lighting designer, and myself, we split the responsibilities of a stage manager. There was limited rehearsal paperwork done, as each department felt comfortable managing themselves. My director handled rehearsals by himself, and I would occasionally attend rehearsal and give notes every so often on dialogue or how to handle situations. My lighting designer was responsible for calling the show, as well as organizing paper tech, dry tech, and tech week. I handled all scheduling, front of house, and theatre management responsibilities.

PAPER AND DRY TECH

Paper and dry tech were slow, but very necessary for the involvement that this show required. The different departments that were called during the show were lights, sound, media, and backstage. The backstage department consisted of myself operating the Matrix Computer, the Data Computer, the main drape, and cueing the SNAPP voiceover actor. Due to the nature of a flexible show ending, media and backstage had to be incredibly detailed and in sync with how cues were called. I would need to quickly let media know all of the potential clues that needed to be found, and they would cue everything up in preparation for the different body and office searches. During the interrogations, our content shared

the Prompt TV. I would let the media operator know when to fade out their prompts so I could send audience questions to prompt the actors.

TIMELINE

The largest take away from the tech process was how much time we needed to have, and how little time we were officially allotted. We were scheduled to load in on February 11th, and performances on February 18th. The last scheduled event in the space ended February 2nd, which meant there was an entire week where nothing was officially on the calendar for that space. I made the decision to load in early on February 3rd to account for troubleshooting, paper tech, dry tech, spacing rehearsals, lighting focus, and a designer run-through. The next week of February 11th was scheduled to be tech every night starting from 6pm to 10pm. February 18th was a test audience to ensure that the show would be able to work with a live audience. February 20th-24th were full performances, with a load-out after the show on the 24th. It was not until we reached the week of the 11th that we fully understood how necessary that extra week was. Had we not had an extra week, we would not have been able to run through each moment of the script as detailed as we needed to in order to ensure a smooth run when the tech elements were joined with the actors during tech week.

Chapter 14: Performances

On most nights, audiences responded very well to the performance. They would laugh with SNAPP's witty comments, and were very eager to send in as many responses as possible when given the opportunity. However there were two events that truly brought out the challenges of bringing audience participation to live performance.

THE RIOT

The first event I call the riot. This was our opening night after previews, with a mostly full house of people. The audience was notably rowdy and excited, and tended to yell more than use their smartphones through the performance. They were very energetic from the beginning. At the office search, the second time they use their phones to tell Daniel where to search, tensions ran high and a few audience members came up on stage. We later learned what had caused this. There was a mix of mistakenly inviting the audience on stage, along with a misinterpretation of the show's format. One audience member pushed over a filing cabinet, and others began to take props back to their seats. SNAPP quickly got everyone off stage, while Daniel collected the props back. The whole ordeal lasted less than five minutes, and the show continued on normally. Afterwards, the cast and crew spoke about future protocols to not entice the audience on stage, but still allow vocal banter.

THE BOMB SCARE

On our second to last night, in the middle of the "holding cell" scene, a person dressed in a UPS outfit walked on stage and claimed to have a package for

Daniel. None of the cast or crew knew who this person was, but Daniel accepted the package anyway, and proceeded to open this poorly taped box on stage. He pulls out a magnifying glass, makes a clever remark, and continues on with the performance. At the end of the night, we had all recounted what was going through our heads at that time, and a majority of us immediately thought it was a bomb in a box; considering how a year prior there were bombs being mailed in Austin, TX. We later discovered that the UPS person was Daniel's roommate, and had casually brought up the idea of doing this on stage. However, Daniel did not think he was serious, and did not tell anyone on the production team that this was a potential idea. His roommate meant no harm, and later apologized for the scare. The audience, meanwhile, had no idea it was even a mistake.

SUMMARY

As my first live produced performance, I learned a lot about how the boundaries between actors and audiences are balanced. In participatory performances, those boundaries need to be redefined and reinforced throughout the performance constantly to maintain a level of control over the performance and the audience. I was unaware of how vulnerable the performance was until it was too late, and I vastly underestimated how to handle a situation of multiple audience members coming on stage.

Chapter 15: Challenges with performances

TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES

An issue that would come up again and again was a lack of a dedicated wireless network that connected to the internet. The wifi was needed to make sure all the audience responses would update in real time, as well as allow audiences to see the poll questions on their phones. A few times the questions would not appear on their phones, and they would be unable to participate in that section.

A smaller but persistent problem was when audience members registered for the wrong night, there was no plan on how to unsubscribe them if they did not contact the help line directly. This would lead to them receiving texts from a performance they were not attending if they chose to be very engaged with the performance.

ACTOR CHALLENGES

A few times during tech and the performances actors would either forget lines or mix up clues. While this may not have been obvious to the audience, considering most of the show is improvised, there are key words the stage manager is listening for in order to cue media to prompt the actors of what to search for. If the actors could not see the prompts, then they would not find all the clues determined by the audience's answers earlier in the show. Eventually we clarified with the actors what specific lines they were required to say, and allow them to improvise the rest.

Another challenge the actors faced was audience control. Because this production encouraged audiences to participate, our actors had to be the facilitators of when it was appropriate for the audience to act out. Unfortunately the director and I did not guide them early enough to handle unruly crowds, and when the audience would get too loud, the actors sometimes came off as being rude and condescending to the audience. After a few performances we were able to guide the actors of how to better handle the audience when they became too rowdy with the actors.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

Chapter 16: Guiding Questions Answered

In conclusion, a large amount of data was gathered, and overall the performance was successfully completed. I went through all of the data in relation to my guiding questions, and learned more than I anticipated.

To recap my first guiding question, I set out to determine if smartphones can be successfully used to engage audience members, by giving them control over the narrative. At the end of the performance I gave the audience a survey with questions based on a scale from one to five. Of the total one hundred and fifty-six participating audience members, forty six percent felt highly engaged (five out of five). However there was a strong lack of feeling in control of the narrative with fifty percent of the audience voting three out of five.

I learned that audience engagement is not related to audience control over the narrative. Audiences felt engaged through a majority of the performance. They were always watching, excited to see what would happen next, and eager to use their smartphones. However, when given choices and questions through the performance, they felt that their choices did not matter. A large reasoning behind this is the lack of instant gratification when making a choice. Audiences had complete control over how the show ended, but the results of their choices were not seen until the end of the show, or were too subtle to pick up on.

My second guiding question asked what techniques of communication and interaction via smartphone worked successfully. Audiences overwhelmingly

preferred multiple choice at fifty-seven percent, compared to Free Response at twenty-nine percent and receiving instructional messages at fourteen percent. Many people felt the waits between votes took too long, while others did not like having to fill out long answers mid-show. Similar to the previous question, much of smartphone culture has trained people to have instant gratification when using smartphones. Throughout the show, there were moments when the pacing of the live performance could not keep up with the speed of how we interact with smartphones. Smartphones create instant responses when we use them with external devices or services. However, when used in conjunction with this particular show, the results of audience choices was not always intended to be an instant response, and unintentionally discouraged audience members from feeling their choices mattered to the performance.

The final guiding question, how can audiences feel the choices they make have actually affected the narrative, was answered in a few ways: With some of the free response moments, Daniel would search the office based on suggestions given by the audience. Several people were surprised at how willing he was to search anywhere the audience suggested, and enjoyed how much their words mattered once they appeared on the television screens. Another example of audiences knowing they affected the narrative comes at the end of the play when the killer said their final monologue. In this monologue, the killer reiterated all the questions the audience answered, with the audiences answers interlaced into it. One night, the audience was so surprised there was an audible gasp heard throughout the theatre. However, I also received criticism that audience's votes had no effect because their personal response was not received, or because the

actors seemed too well rehearsed and all of the improv moments were scripted. Another critique I received was that many audience members were disappointed that the final vote did not choose the killer. I had determined that the audience should collectively find out who the killer was, and not choose who they wanted it to be. I thought audiences would have tried to follow the clues to determine the killer, rather than have the show fully cater to what they wanted to see, similar to other murder-mystery productions.

In the end, audiences thoroughly enjoyed using their smartphones during the performance. Many felt it kept them engaged with the performance, while others thought that yelling out answers was just as good. However, many feel that it added a new element to live performance, and made participation very easy. Based on the performance, audiences enjoyed the improvisation, seeing their responses pop up on the televisions, and the use of the A.I. SNAPP as a medium to bring audience participation into the world of the performance.

In terms of negative feedback, audiences generally disliked other audience members. Many were too talkative or did not know how far to push the level of audience engagement. Visitors to the performance also had mixed feelings about the strength of the clues, and wondered if they truly held up against each character. Some felt the killer was too obvious, while others could not see the relation.

Chapter 17: Reflection

After all of the performances were finished, and spending some time speaking with my colleagues, there are several things that I have reflected on. The audience overall enjoyed the performance, but I believe that the inherent humor in the script is what helped make it so engaging. I would like to try this style of performance again with a better balance of comical and serious tones, and see how the audience reacts to it. I think having a façade of an AI as a narrator character assisted in the comical nature of the performance. There were several jokes that SNAPP would say based on audience answers, which encouraged audience members to be more engaged.

A major aspect of the performance that I definitely would like to revisit is creating a stronger language with the audience of what is and is not allowed at the performance. While I was mentally prepared to have audience members come on stage or talk back with the audience, I was grossly unprepared for the wild variety of how audience members will react when the “normal” rules of the theatre are put aside. “Normal” rules being keep quiet, phones off, and remain seated. Without setting up a new set of rules for the audience to follow, and simply telling them to use their phone is not enough to engage audiences with smartphones. An example with these performances was audiences would not always be sure of when it was appropriate to participate and when they needed to listen for vital information. A lot of that can be traced back to the improvisational nature of the performance, and how when one audience member shouts at a cast member and gets a response, more audience members will follow that example. I could have set up a brief before the show saying whenever a certain phrase is said, that’s the time to pay

attention rather than speak out. This also ties in to audience members being rude to other audience members by talking to one another. A constant complaint I received was too many people were having side conversations during the show. This may be due to there being no consequences for talking during the show, as opposed to any other mainstream theatre where you would get removed from the theatre for being disruptive.

If I were to re-write the play, I would make sure that the tempo of the performance would keep more in time with the tempo of how audiences use their smartphones. For example, lets say I needed a character to make a quick decision between several choices. I would have the character stall for time while the audience would quickly send in responses in a very short amount of time. The pacing of the moment in the play feels very rushed, and I would replicate that for the audience. If a scene required a bit more thought, I would give the audience more time to consider their responses in a more relaxed setting.

For my final words, I truly believe that smartphones are the future to creating a more engaging experience for audiences in live theatre. They allow audiences to be more engaged with the action on stage from the comfort of their seats. There is a lot of potential with utilizing smart technology that exists in society, and live performance needs to catch up with the modern world. Otherwise it's their funeral.

Appendix (or Appendices)

A: Technology and System Design

In this next paragraph, I go into some detail about how all of the computers relate to one another. To simplify things, let's call the computer in the booth, Booth Comp.; the computer used to switch video signals, Matrix Comp.; the computer used to display polls and prompts, Data Comp; and the computer used to gather participatory data, send text messages, and activate polls, Participation Comp. Some other concepts you will need to understand are: A .csv file is a primitive version of a Microsoft Excel file; All the computers used in the show are networked together with Ethernet cables, which allows for data and video content transfer; The theatre space we were in did not have a Wi-Fi router, so we were using the wifi from a different building, which made it very unreliable; I am using a program called Touch Designer on the Matrix Computer, which is a heavily customizable program that can take in multiple signals, modify them, and send them out again.

About 5 minutes before the show started, I would use the Participation Comp. and go to the google form of that night, download a .csv file, sort out only the people who wanted to be “very engaged”, and import that into Textedly. That way I could instantly add a full subscriber group in one sweep, and not worry about last minute adds. Once added, I would send a welcome text stating that the audience would receive texts throughout the show from this number, and that there was no need to reply. This way the audience can distinguish that texts are prompts given to them, where the web browser would be used to respond to polls. If I had

kept the polling as a text option, people might have gotten confused as to which number to text their reply to, and would not see clearly if their responses were recorded. The web browser would show which response they selected, and clearly show more user-friendly data than a simple text message.

By this point, the audience has already filled out the opening survey, and received a text if they wanted to participate. I won't go into detail of each cue, but throughout the show, the other 3 computers become vital to the performance. The Booth and Data computers both fed video signals to the Matrix computer. The Matrix computer was attached to all the TVs, so I could send any video signal from any computer to any TV. The Booth computer, however, had a direct video feed to the Stage and Prompt TVs that could override the Matrix computer. This way I would not have to worry about show content material, and only focus on poll data and responses. When we came up to an audience participation section, the Data computer would send the live poll feed to the Matrix computer, and that would send it to the Audience TVs. At later times in the show after audiences would respond, the Booth computer would directly send prompts to the Prompt tv. At one point in the show, we have interrogations of all the suspects. Earlier we prompted audiences to send in their own interrogation questions. Between the time it took for the audience to send in their questions and the interrogation scene, myself and my board op looked through all of the questions and handpicked 8 of the best or funniest questions. This allowed for 2 audience questions per interrogation, among scripted questions. When it came time for the interrogations the Data computer operator would type out the question, and send them to the Matrix computer, which would display them on the Prompt TV. This way the

actors could remain on stage and continue a seamless transition into how the audience's answers were integrated into the performance.

B: Character Names and Roles

Leo – Editor in chief of National Online Writers

Felix – Leo’s Brother

Sara – A Politician running for office

Alex –Editor In Chief of a rival company to Leo

Roseanne – Leo’s Assistant

Daniel – Detective

SNAPP – Intelligent AI voiceover

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